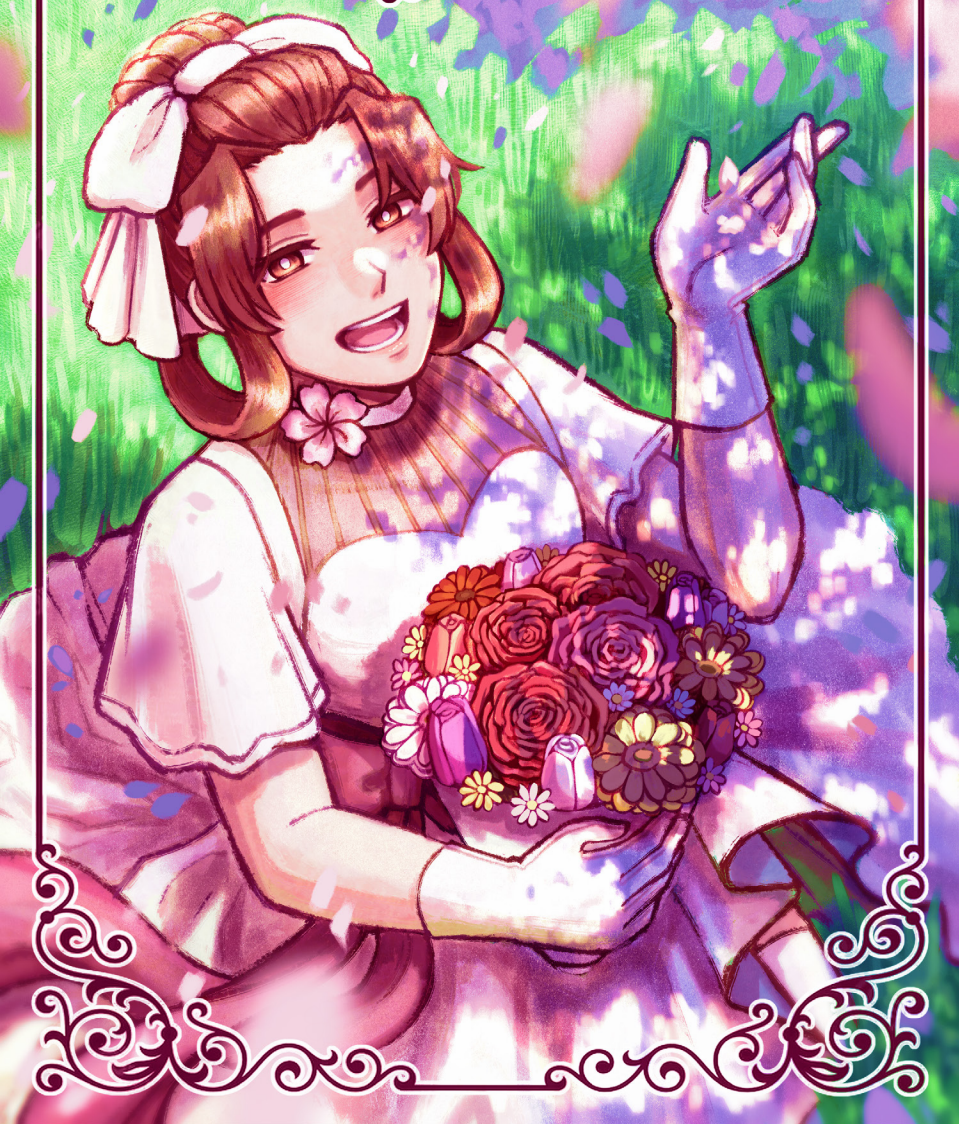


Blossoming Love

A Susato Mikotoba WLW zine



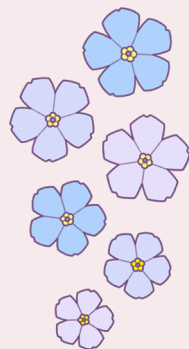
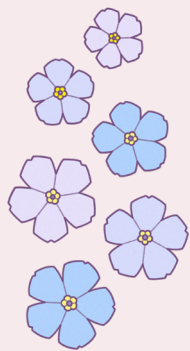




Blossoming Love: A Susato Mikotoba WLW Zine is an unofficial, fanmade project made for entertainment purposes only. The Great Ace Attorney/Dai Gyakuten Saiban, and all associated characters, are owned by Capcom.

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Spot Art by May

Thank you for choosing to download Blossoming Love: A Susato Mikotoba WLW Zine.

We have spent many hours putting this project together for this delightful community to enjoy. Our contributors and mod team have worked hard to make this project a reality with love and passion. As

we reflect back on what we've accomplished, we know it wouldn't be a success without all of your enthusiastic support. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you.

In this zine, you will see the following ship content: susahao, susagina, nikosusa, and ginasusahao. We have spent time letting each artist and writer express their vision of what they love about the ship and putting a creative spin on it.

We hope this project will inspire our community to create more sapphic content, no matter which fandom you end up creating something for.

Though this zine is free to access, we ask that you support each creator in this zine in their future endeavors, especially if there's someone who you are especially captivated by. We will have everyone's socials at the end of this project so you can find the accounts to support.

Without further ado, we now present Blossoming Love: A Susato Mikotoba WLW Zine!

Enjoy!

Sincerely,

The Blossoming Love Mod Team



Spot Art by Bams



wasure-nagusa

by Valentine

It was a peaceful day at 221B Baker's Street, which was a rare commodity. In fact, it was the first peaceful day they had gotten since Susato's return to England. Between cases, familiar faces, mysteries, and historites, Susato had hardly gotten the chance to fully unpack from her journey. Which was what she intended to fix today. It was almost getting stressful how unkempt her bedroom was. She simply had to fix it for her own peace of mind.

She always enjoyed tidying. The methodical action of pulling clothing from her trunk to hang or store had a calming repetition to it. Though, some of these things had been in her trunk so long that they needed a good shake to straighten it out. It was while she was doing such shaking that a small note fluttered to the floor, seemingly falling from the sleeve of a kimono.

"Now what's this?" Susato asked aloud to herself while bending over to retrieve the note. How strange for this to be in her luggage. But it was likely nothing important, probably a stray paper that had fallen in while packing.

Out of curiosity, and to ensure it wasn't anything of import, she unfolded the small paper to read it, only to be met with another surprise. Small blue flowers fell from the page and onto the floor. With a small jump, Susato quickly retrieved them. Each flower had clearly been carefully pressed and retained a beautiful blue color. This note

only became more of a mystery. Gently, she placed the flowers on her desk as she sat to carefully examine this now certainly important letter.

It was written in English and started with a common opening. But, as Susato read, it quickly became uncommon. Words of admiration, words of *affection*. She could feel her face slowly match her kimono in hue. This was clearly written by someone that knew her well...and appeared to be infatuated.

But whom? There was no signature, only a hint. *Remember Me.*

Susato simply had to find out. There was a chance...a blessed chance. There were few that knew Susato this well, even fewer whom she'd be willing to return the affections of. A note hidden in her luggage, little flowers to accent the words. It certainly made her want to hope.

But she wouldn't rush to any conclusions! She had to analyze all the evidence available to her before theorizing any further. And this situation called for back-up.

"I don't recognize the handwriting," Iris declared from Susato's desk. The pink haired doctor had been recruited to inspect this matter to the fullest extent, starting with analyzing the note. "Whoever wrote this is not someone I know. I'm afraid that's all I can tell you for the handwriting. However..."

Iris hopped out of her chair and crossed the room to where the kimono lay on Susato's bed. It had to be examined for clues, after all.

"This is where it came from?" Iris asked while looking in every fold of the fabric.

"That's right, and I hadn't touched it since packing it in Japan. So I only just discovered it today," Susato explained, double checking her other clothing for hidden notes.

"Then that only leaves two options," Iris said with a finger to her forehead, "either someone put that note into your trunk while



you were packing, or someone broke into this apartment to put it in your things.”

“Do you truly think someone would do that?” Susato said, shocked.

“Hurly is famous, so people have tried to break in before. But there’s no sign of that here. My *Iris Apartment Protector* didn’t activate either. So, it must be the first one,” Iris said with a flick of her wrist, “is there anyone you think would write that note for you in Japan? I don’t know your friends there, so I can’t help figure that out.”

“Well...there is one person who I...hope wrote it,” Susato said, suddenly feeling a bit shy. The moment the words left her mouth, Iris was staring at her expectantly. She supposed she had to explain now, and part of her was eager to share. She hadn’t often got the chance to speak of this, after all.

“There is this friend of mine, a student of my father’s, that is very dear to me. I do not know if Naruhodo-san read the letters I sent. But while I was in Japan, I had to defend her in court. I was happy to do so. She’s been my friend for so long. She’s simply so dedicated and brilliant. All throughout the trial, she would look at me with these adoring eyes...I must admit I can’t seem to forget them. Nor can I forget how she called me dashing as she stared,” Susato said, fingers fidgeting with the sleeve of her kimono, “but I would hate to assume she wrote this and be wrong. It could make her terribly uncomfortable.”

Susato finished speaking and glanced at Iris, only to see two shining eyes staring up at her. It was clear Iris was now entirely invested.

“It sounds like you love her,” Iris said with a small smile, “I can’t say I know who wrote the letter, but it is clear who you wish for it to be from. It is obvious that whoever wrote the letter loves you. The flowers are forget-me-nots, which stand for love and remembrance,

after all. But I think, no matter who wrote this letter, you should tell your friend how you feel.”

“Is it really that simple?”

“I believe it can be. You simply have to try.”

Time moved on. Events distracted Susato from that gentle note, but she took good care of it. She had to preserve it to identify its owner, after all. And in that time, she managed to learn a few tricks from Iris on how to identify handwriting. Hopefully, once things settle down, she would be able to search once again. Surely, the one that wrote it would be close by for a response.

But no one confessed. Certainly not Haori, who had been spending much time with Susato since her return to Japan. It was almost maddening. What could she do to lure its author to her? Perhaps a more direct approach was necessary, but she didn’t wish to inform all the world of her longing heart just yet.

“What is it, Susato?” Haori asked suddenly. They had been spending the day together and were currently having a picnic in a small park. The flowers had begun to bloom again. It would have been a beautiful sight had Susato not been staring so intensely at the folded note in her hand.

“Oh, sorry, it’s just...” Susato hesitated. Part of her still hoped this letter was from Haori. Surely the other would have recognized it and mentioned it since Susato was holding it in her hands. But Haori was still her best friend either way. “Someone’s written me this note, you see, and I’m not certain who. But I would very much like to know. It’s a...love note.”

Haori went quiet for a moment, looking away as she raised an arm to hide her mouth as she so often did. Why did Haori seem shy in that? Why did Haori seem *sad* in that? Was Haori jealous? But jealous over what? That Susato was receiving such attention when she wasn’t



or that she was receiving that attention from *someone else*? There was only one way to find out.

Susato had just been about to ask her dear friend when Haori suddenly faced her again. Without a word, she placed a long stem with multiple smaller flowers into Susato's hair above her ear. Curious, Susato glanced at the flowers.

Forget-me-nots.

"Did you forget so quickly?" Haori said with a shy sadness while turning away once again.

The pair of young women stood facing each other on a dock, hands clasped together. Susato was about to leave for England after a visit that seemed all too brief to Haori. Could she not stay any longer? But as they said their goodbyes, Haori suddenly pulled the other into an embrace.

"Remember me, please," she whispered, holding back tears.

Suddenly, the puzzle finished itself and revealed a rather splendid picture. How could Susato have overlooked such a clue? Her answer had been here all along, and she had missed it.

"Haori, I never forgot you," Susato said, quickly finding just the same flower to repeat the other's action, "I'm sorry for making you wait so long to hear your answer."

At the touch to her hair, Haori turned to the other in surprise, face quickly turning a soft pink. Slowly, she smiled.

"And what is my answer?" she asked softly, unable to help hiding her face just a bit.

"That I should be happy to have so kind and beautiful a companion at my side," Susato said, feeling a bit shy herself but would never look away as she spoke it.

"I knew you would say something dashing like that," Haori giggled before slowly lowering her hand to the space between them.

Susato noticed the motion and mimicked it. This must be alright then. To slowly shift her hand until their little fingers brushed against each other. Neither of them spoke as the digits gently curled around each other.

It seemed notes would never be necessary again as something new bloomed among the flowers.



Remember Me

by Defaney

The S.S. Burya approaches the harbor just after noon to great fanfare. Rumors have been spreading for weeks—the great detective Sholmes, coming to Tokyo! Curious hopefuls have been flocking by the docks ever since. Susato is thrilled to see him on the deck, of course, but the gossips of Tokyo seem to forget that he hasn't come alone. Iris is with him, waving at the approaching dock with the full force of both arms. Iris's uncle, Lord van Zieks, has finally agreed to take a vacation and brings his apprentice, Susato's own brother. It's strange to see Lord van Zieks in the Japanese sunshine—she figured that he had an allergy to sunlight. Stranger still to see Kazuma, but he's here and smiling. And beyond that, Gina's letter seemed to hint that...

And the hint is the truth, because Gina emerges onto the deck with her luggage, Toby following at her heels. She's in a rich green kimono that can only be Iris-made, and Susato can see her freckles from the distance of several ships. The delicate blonde curls escaping her bun blow gently in the breeze, and there's something stinging like heartburn in Susato's chest.

The ship comes to a stop, and Susato watches as Gina offloads her luggage to van Zieks and sprints for dry land. The thwack of her sandals on the dock echoes as if she's hearing it in a cave and then suddenly Susato can hear her voice, not the words but the mere sound of it and she can't help but follow, pulled towards her like a magnet until Gina barrels into her.

“Sooze,” she says, and then nothing else. She smells like salt water and pencil lead and something Susato can only call *London*. Susato wraps her arms around her and breathes it in. At their feet, Toby barks once, twice, and then cries, which is enough that Gina lets go.

“Yes, yes, I know, you wanna see ‘er, too. Here ya go, bud. Have a sniff.”

Gina lifts him up towards Susato’s face and yes, he’s very cute, but she’s more enraptured by Gina’s smile, the way the corners of her eyes crinkle with the force of it.

“I’m so glad to see you,” Susato tells her. It’s a plain thing to say, but one of the truest things she’s ever said. Toby gives her a kiss for her effort.

“Suzie! Over here!” Iris hollers from somewhere in the crowd.

In the same direction, she can hear Ryunosuke laughing, Kazuma laughing louder, and Barok sighing. Her father is there somewhere, and Sholmes must be close to him, if not literally attached. They don’t have a bubble to themselves, not yet, but when Gina calls out “Over this way, you lot!” and settles so close to Susato’s side that she can feel the weight of her arm against her own, Susato knows that she simply must find one soon.



There isn’t a rickshaw in all of Tokyo big enough for their party, and luck’s on Susato’s side—she winds up with Gina, Toby, and most of the luggage. As soon as they’re inside, Gina grabs her hand, blushing profusely. Susato, when they’re in an alley where she’s sure no one can see them, raises the hand to her lips and gives it a quick, soft kiss.



“You’re gonna kill me if ya keep that up,” she complains, but there’s no real bite behind it. “I won’t even be able to arrest ya for murder about it cause I’ll be dead.”

Susato, for her own part, repeats the trick, giggling into the warm skin of the back of Gina’s hand.

“You wouldn’t be able to arrest me, anyway,” she says. “Tokyo is outside of your jurisdiction.”

“Fair, fair.”

The rickshaw keeps on moving. Gina turns to look at the street, and then at Susato, and then back out with such speed that she finds herself worrying about her neck.

“Is there something particularly fascinating out there?” Susato asks. She doesn’t see anything—it’s just another street in Tokyo, like the thousand other streets she sees every day.

“All of it,” she says.

“All of it?”

“Yeah. All of it! I ain’t never seen anythin’ like this, not anywhere in London.”

London. Thinking of that grand city in comparison to Tokyo makes her feel shy. “It must seem very plain to you.”

Gina gapes at her. “You’ve lost your mind, Sooze! I’d do nothin’ but walk around this city all day if I could! Besides, I always knew Tokyo was gonna be nice. It had to be. It made you, didn’t it?”

Susato hides her smile behind her sleeve. “Well, I could give you a small tour after we drop off your luggage. What do you think?”

“I think that’s the best idea I’ve ‘eard since Asougi told van Zieks to drink maple syrup.”

“...And he drank it?”

“A whole ‘allowed chalice of it,” Gina says, and with a good twenty minutes left in the ride, launches into her tale.





When all of Gina's luggage is in Susato's room and Toby is happily using Ryunosuke as a pillow, Susato tugs on Gina's sleeve.

"Are you ready for your tour?"

Gina gives her a joking, jaunty little salute. "Aye aye! Lead the way, Sooze."

Admittedly, there's a lot of things to see in Tokyo. Susato didn't realize it until she tried to plan her tour while organizing luggage. There's too much to see in one trip, but she can at least take Gina to the closest stops, can lead her through the mid-afternoon crowd to the red towering temple of Sensō-ji. As they approach, Gina nudges her.

"What's this place, then?"

"Sensō-ji," Susato tells her. "It's the oldest temple in Tokyo. Follow my lead, and we should be able to get some fortunes at the end."

Gina raises her eyebrows and does as she says. She trusts Susato to lead her, and she guides Gina through the motions of praying as best as she can. It's significant, to be allowed Gina's trust at all. She won't waste it, nor will she allow herself to miss the way she stares at the art, at the people passing them by, the statues of Kannon that Susato's seen a dozen times but that are brand new to her. They seem more brilliant than usual, when Susato can look at them while Gina does. More promising.

Further in the temple, Susato spots the shrine maiden with a box. She fetches the usual fee for fortunes and ushers Gina forward.

"If you give her your coins, she'll hold out the box. Pick a slip, and that'll be your fortune. The slips will be in Japanese, but I'll translate."

"Got it."

Gina holds out the coins with a careful caution, and as soon as the maiden holds out the box for her, she digs through it and emerges with a slip. Susato leans over her shoulder to read it.

"Great fortune," she says through a smile. "It's the best you can get."

Gina grins at her. "Seems 'bout right to me, since I'm in Tokyo with everybody. You want to get one, too?"

She didn't want to until the suggestion, but Gina's looking at her with such joy that Susato can't help it—she gives her offering and plucks one from the box.

"Future blessing," Susato translates.

"That ain't shabby!"

And Gina's right—it's a middling fortune, but not at all bad. It's just not true. Susato watches Gina squint at the paper as they leave, sees her try to puzzle out the English words into Japanese characters, and knows that the blessing isn't in the future; it's now.



From the temple, Susato takes her to get tempura and sweets from the ever-crowded Nakamise-dōri, which they eat as they walk to the National Museum in Ueno Park. The museum is beautiful, but what's more beautiful is the closeness it affords them. No one thinks twice if a tourist in a museum sticks close to her translator, if they walk arm-in-arm, if Susato whispers the contents of the placards close enough to Gina's ear that she can sneak quick kisses to the side of her head in the emptier exhibits, and no one is any wiser. No one except Gina, whose ears are red as beets by the time they leave.

And from the museum, Susato spots the lake and only gets halfway through the question—*do you want to go see it?*—before it's Gina



dragging her towards the water, until it's them renting a little rowboat and paddling out.

"They don't got nothin' like this on the Thames!" Gina says, pushing them around with all of her might. The sleeves of her kimono are soaked with lake water and her smile is unshakeable. The koi fish come by and Gina reaches a hand into the water to watch them come closer. "I hope these things don't bite too hard."

"No harder than Toby," Susato reassures. She's seen thousands of koi in her lifetime, bright orange flitting past, but they look different now, these fish that pass from Gina to her. More vivid, somehow. Supercharged with life.

They stay on the water until the sun starts to set and their rented time ends. Gina looks dejected as they paddle back, but is only put out until she notices the cherry blossom trees. Susato knows a good one, a more isolated spot towards the back of the park. At first, they simply walk side by side, but as they get closer, Susato takes the risk and reaches for her hand.

The tree Susato sits down by is a favorite—it gives good shade in the summer, and is one of the last to die come winter. When she sits, Gina lays down with her head in Susato's lap. It's natural to reach over and play with the stray curls, for Susato to twirl each one around her fingers as the cherry blossoms fall around them.

"I missed you somethin' awful," Gina admits. "I didn't know I could miss anybody so much 'til you were gone, but man... All of that was worth it, I think. To see you again, and to see you here."

"To see me specifically in Tokyo?"

"Mhmm," she confirms. "Cause I've never been. Don't get me wrong, I love London, but I like bein' a tourist. Seein' all these places that you know about. Tokyo's pretty big, ain't it?"

Susato nods. "It's the largest city in Japan."

Spot Art by Rai



"So there's more stuff to see tomorrow?"

"Plenty."

"I'm glad," Gina says, closing her eyes. "I want to be a Tokyo expert. Then we're gonna 'ave to go somewhere neither of us know nothin' about together. Maybe a couple of places. What do you think 'bout Madrid? I 'eard they got somethin' with bulls that could be fun."

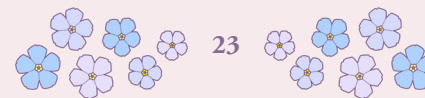
Madrid. Barcelona.
Grenada. Seville. Lisbon.

Rome. Berlin. Kyoto, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Seoul. The world is so large, truly massive, containing too many cities to even try and name. Susato wants to explore them all with Gina, but she also wants to come back here. Home, which seems more beautiful than ever with Gina here to witness it with her.

"I'll go to Madrid any time," she says. "We'll do a continental tour. Every city from London to Tokyo."

"And then we can go to the Americas," Gina says. "And Africa. And all of the little islands that don't have a continent. And Antarctica, too, but I think Toby would need a real nice coat to do that."

"Iris and I can make him one," Susato says, and she closes her eyes, too. Drifts off for a few minutes. Susato dreams of snowy cherry blossoms and matching dog-owner coats and Gina's mittened hands, and the dream is lovely, but waking up is lovely, too. It means there's more of the world to see with Gina by her side, and more time to do it.





Dear Susato,

I feel as though this always
lingered somewhere within me—
like the calm before the storm
(the rain to your lightning).

But I did not see it.

No, I could not see it.

I could not see it
until you were there
in front of me,
offering to be my shield.

Love. Or something akin to that.
Like a bolt of lightning
you strike me
just as you always have.

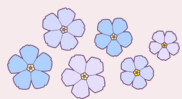
Or perhaps I fell;
in something like an avalanche
where a single pebble
triggers a landslide of emotion.

I know you like me—
as a friend if nothing else,
but that is not my only desire.

So if you'd be so kind,
tell me if you love me too?

Love,
Haori

*To My
Beloved*
by River





Dear Love

by Digitaldreams

Nothing had felt the same since Susato had returned to Japan.

Two months had come and gone since the ship left the harbor, and not a day went by without Gina thinking about her friend. It felt as if the world had been picked up and shifted slightly to the left, still intact and fine on the surface but fundamentally wrong to anyone who looked deeper. Gina missed Susato and Ryunosuke more than anything, and on some days it felt like the yearning was going to eat her alive if she wasn't careful.

That was how Gina found herself in front of her desk with a pen in one hand and a piece of paper resting on the wood before her. She had been working on reading and writing over the last few months, and while she wasn't the best, she still knew what she was doing to some degree. Loneliness was a desperate beast, and Gina wanted to soothe it as soon as possible. The best idea she could come up with to resolve the tension in her chest involved writing letters, and so, she reached for a page and tried to whisper a lullaby to her isolation with her words.

Gina had never written a letter before. She hadn't known how to read or write when she was living on the streets of London, and after she started learning, she hadn't been given a reason to pick up a pen and put her new skills to good use. Missing Susato... That was a reason though. Gina didn't know what to say specifically, but she had to at least try. Her hand began to move before she knew it, and she just let herself write:

Dear Sooze Susato,

It's been a while, hasn't it? Things haven't been the same since you left. A lot has been going on. I think London is starting to get back to normal after the Professor nonsense. It's taking a while, but we'll get there.

I miss you. I hope you'll be able to come visit soon. How are things in Japan? I want to know.

Gina

It was hardly the best letter ever written, but Gina didn't let herself question it. Instead, she just tucked the page away into an envelope and set it aside. She'd be able to ask Iris to help her mail it later on. More importantly, Gina needed to push it away before she lost her confidence to send it at all. It was just a letter, but it felt like a chain on her neck and a weight off her shoulders.

She had done it. She didn't know where it would go from there, but she could figure that out later.



Susato went through the mail with a hum on her lips before her fingers struck upon something interesting. She pulled a small envelope from the pile, her eyes going wide when she realized it was from Britain. The name on the envelope was a familiar one, and Susato tore into it as quickly and carefully as she could, not wanting to rip it but desperate to see its contents.

Susato read the letter from Gina at breakneck speeds, relishing in each word as her smile grew wider. It was simple, but Susato loved it all. Any plans she had for the next hour were cast aside immediately, and she darted over to her desk before starting to pen her reply:



Dear Gina,

I'm delighted to hear from you! It's been far too long. I'm glad to hear things are going well in London. I've been missing you and the rest of our friends dearly. I would love to visit Britain soon, and I know Mr. Naruhodo would agree.

The reformation of the judicial system is a slow process, but we're making good progress. I look forward to seeing how this ends even if we have a lot of work yet ahead of us. I would love for you to be able to see it for yourself one day.

I hope we can see one another again. In the meantime, I would love to receive more letters from you. This brightened my day like nothing else.

I hope you're doing well. I miss you.

Signed,

Susato

Susato paused for a moment before adding one final comment to the bottom of the page.

There's no need to be formal, by the way. It's okay to call me Sooze.

Susato sealed the envelope with a smile on her face. She could go and mail the letter the following morning. That would be a perfect way to start off her day, and it would brighten her mood like nothing else. Besides, the sooner she could send the letter, the sooner she would be able to expect a response.

This was everything she could have ever wanted, and she loved it.





As soon as Gina received Susato's letter, she picked up her pen and began to write:

Dear Sooze,

I'm glad to hear things are going well in Japan. They're lucky to have you there. I don't think they'd be able to even come close to pulling this off without your help. You did a lot to help us over here, after all.

Gina paused for a moment, biting at her lip. Before she could stop herself, she kept writing, ignoring every whisper in the back of her mind that this was a bad idea:

I've missed you a lot since you left. It's just not the same around here without you. I've finally been able to do some real detective work on my own. I'm working with your brother, actually. Soggy's a strange one, but he knows what he's doing. I think he misses you too... You and Oddo. I know you don't have any ideas about when you'll be able to come back here for a visit, but I'm looking forward to it. I hope you are too. Tell me if you ever plan to come to Britain. I'll start counting the days.

Gina

When Gina finished the letter, she sighed and sat back in her chair. She held Susato's response note close to her chest. The page still smelled vaguely like flowers the same way Susato did. It was a piece of home Gina hadn't known she needed until she was given the chance to enjoy it. Now, she could never imagine letting it go.

Writing to Susato always brought a smile to her face. There was something so special about Susato that Gina couldn't quite describe. Her chest got all warm and fuzzy when she thought about Susato, and

her stomach filled with butterflies. It felt like she was on top of the world as long as her friend was on her mind.

That probably didn't mean anything too significant, right?

As soon as she thought that, Gina was practically slapped with a reminder of what Iris had told her earlier in the day. She had found a sweet fairy tale novel recently and couldn't stop reading it for its depictions of love. Gina hadn't seen what the excitement was about, but she gladly listened to Iris detail what love was like for the two people in the story for the sake of making her friend happy.

Warm chest, stomach full of butterflies, feeling incredible thinking about the other person...

Oh.



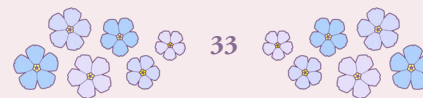
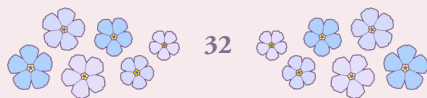
Dear Gina,

I've been thinking a lot about making a trip to Britain soon. I haven't been able to stop thinking about you, Mr. Sholmes, and Iris lately. It's been too long since we saw one another. Mr. Naruhodo and my father seem to miss Britain too, though I think they miss the people more than anything. If all goes well, we should be able to carve out time for a visit in the next few months. I could certainly use the break.

I miss you a lot too, Gina. I meant it when I said I can't stop thinking about you. I hope you're doing well. I want to see your new profession in action, but beyond that, I want to see you. A lot has happened, and I know a lot has changed, but I want to see the same old Gina again. I miss you.

Signed,

Susato





Dear Sooze,

I'm looking forward to your trip to Britain. Mr. Sholmes gave me the news today that you're coming to visit with Oddo and your father. I haven't been able to stop thinking about it. I can't wait for you to see everything we've been up to here since you left. You practically won't recognize London when you come here, and that's a good thing.

But before you come, there's something I need to tell you. I've been thinking about it a lot lately, and I need to say it through writing instead of in person. I don't want to back out. I...I love you, Sooze. It took me a while to realize it, but that's why I've been missing you so much. I want to be with you all the time instead of just waiting for the next time you come to visit. You can think whatever you want of this. I just had to say it.

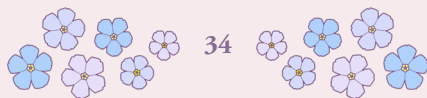
I miss you, Sooze. I really do.

Love,

Gina



The day of Susato, Ryunosuke, and Yujin's arrival in London, Gina was sent out to retrieve them. The other occupants of 221B were out working on a case they couldn't get away from, and that left Gina as the one in charge with picking up their guests. Gina would never say it out loud, but she suspected Iris had something to do with this. She had giggled when suggesting the older girl pick up Susato and company from the harbor, and Gina just pretended she didn't know what Iris was on about. Iris was too perceptive for her own good, and Gina knew it was going to come back to bite her if she acknowledged it at all.



To say Gina was nervous was the understatement of the century. She hadn't received any other letters since telling Susato that she loved her, and Gina had no idea how the other girl would respond. The detective's palms had been sweating all night, and she was exhausted by the time the boat arrived at sunrise.

Susato was the first one to step off the boat out of the trio of guests, and she waved to Gina enthusiastically as soon as she caught a glimpse of her old friend. All of Gina's previous insecurities melted away in the blink of an eye, and she gladly embraced Susato when she approached. Susato still smelled like flowers even over a year and a half after their last meeting, and Gina let the scent fill her lungs dreamily.

"I love you too," Susato whispered into Gina's ear, and the detective froze on the spot. She remained still as Susato pulled away from their hug to produce the most recent letter Gina had sent. "I wanted to be able to tell you in person. I love you too, Gina."

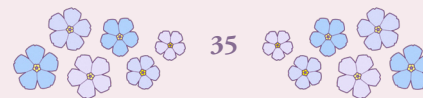
The blush that crept across Gina's cheeks quickly spread to her ears, leaving her face bright pink in a matter of seconds. "I don't want to leave you again," Susato went on. "If you would have me...I would love to stay at your side from this day forward."

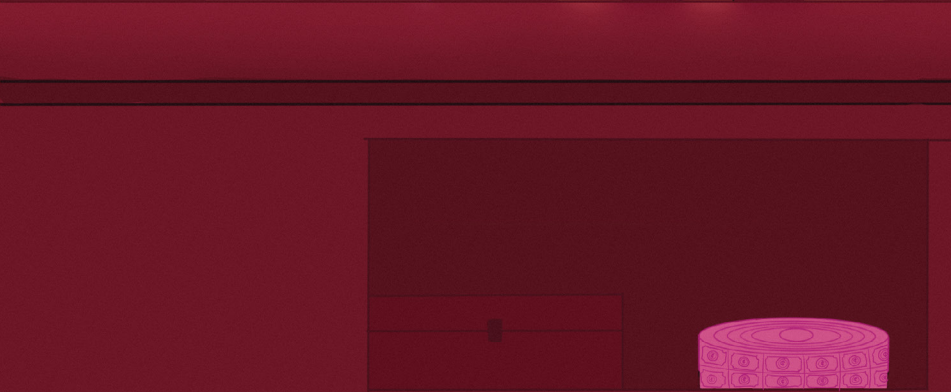
Gina nodded as soon as she was able to bring herself back down to earth. Her heart was pounding rapidly in her ears, but she didn't bother to calm its screaming. Instead, she just let out the breath she hadn't even realized she had been holding. "Yeah...I'd like that too. I love ya, Sooze."

Susato embraced Gina once again. "I love you too."



The first thing Gina and Susato did when they arrived back at 221B Baker Street was compile their letters in a single box. The set was complete. They were together, and they would never part ways again.





Until then,
Sometimes you
just need a break.



Oh,
Haori,

What would
I do without
you?!



Well,

you'll never
have to
find out.



I'll always
be here for
you.



...Haori.

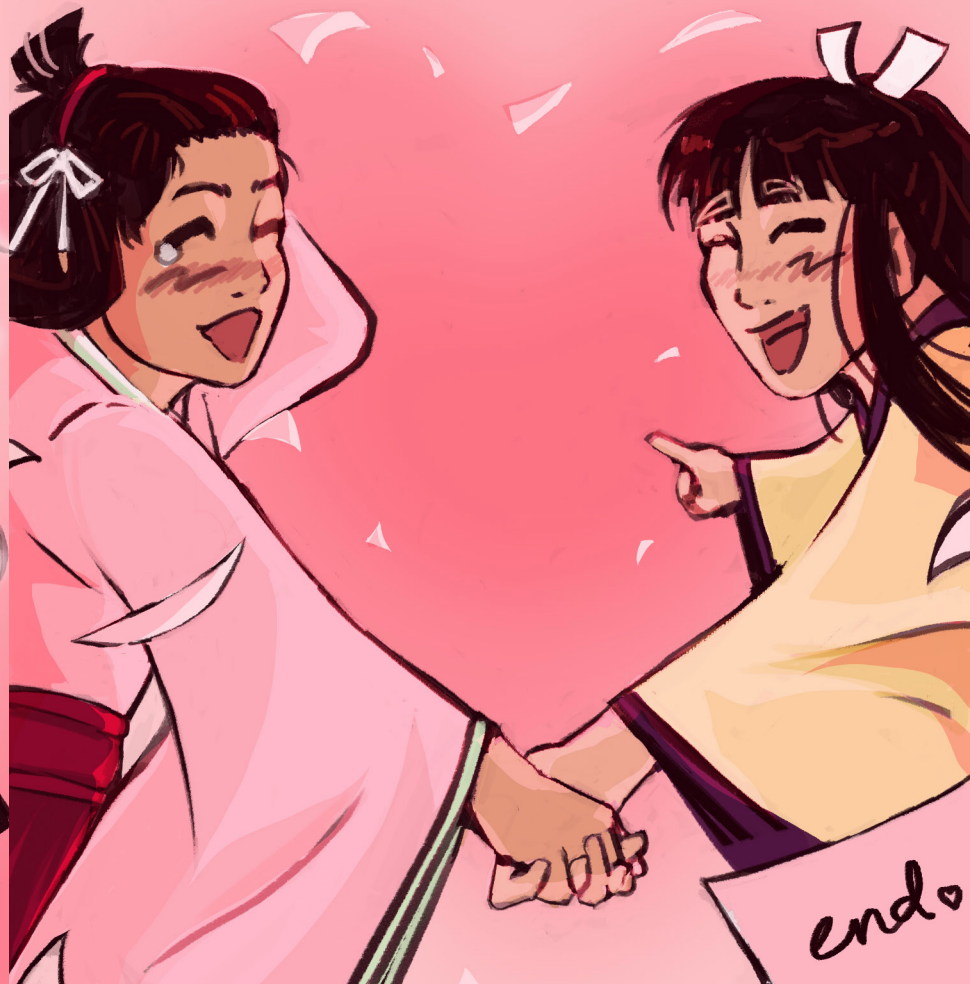
I'd like to
take you up
on that
break you
mentioned.



So...



Where would you like
to go on our date?



endo

Miss Mikotoba,

June 1902

It has taken me a long time to write this letter. I want to start with an apology. Even after I was told the truth of what happened and was relieved to hear I didn't take Mr. Asogi's life, the guilt still lingered. I still lied to get out of trouble. It was wrong of me.

Yet, I find myself thinking of you often. Your passion and drive has not left my mind once. I had never met anyone so confident of themselves...

It's something I aspire to be one day.

Now that I have been told you know the truth of what happened that day, I wonder if it would be too much to ask if I could somehow make it up to you. Perhaps it may be too early to ask now, but maybe one day.

If you can at least respond to let me know this got to you, that would be appreciated.

Sincerely,
Nikolina

January 1903

Miss Pavlova,
I apologise for my late reply. I was stunned to receive a letter from you. I thought we would never cross paths again. Though, to hear from you is a blessing. I was always curious about how you fared after that fateful day. I hope that America is treating you well. I heard it is a wonderful yet difficult place to adapt to.

I have come to understand your reasoning. I have grown as a person and met many people just like you: backed into a corner and having to lie for their own safety. Fearing the consequences of telling the truth will lead them into something worse...

As for your offer, I am open to it. For now, I am afraid I am not in a position to travel right now. I am very busy with going to university and pursuing my own path in life.

Perhaps, one day you can show me around America. I have always wondered what it was like.

Best Wishes,
Susato Mikotoba

Two Letters Through Time by Effory







和口リ, or wa lolita, merges the lolita silhouette and feel with components of the Japanese kimono. Some coordinates are made with actual kimonos, while others simply replicate the sleeve styles, necklines, or textile patterns characteristic to them. Quality craftsmanship is essential to wa lolita.

Susato Mikotoba and Haori Murasame combine European and Japanese influences to make coordinates that not only reflect their unique tastes, but complement each other.

The editors at *Blossoming Love* declare them the best-dressed couple for spring. See below for a detailed breakdown of their fashion.

blossoming street style

by Ana

Susato

The spring motif is unmistakable: dreamy ivory provides a base color of cherry-blossom pink fading into peach, while black accents provide an elegant touch. The button-up bodice, ruffled shoulders, and bow tie evoke classic lolita, while the sleeves drape in the style of a traditional kimono. Susato opts for a cherry-blossom print on the sleeves, another element drawn from kimono patterns.

No lolita coordinate is complete without a frothy skirt, and this

is no exception. The skirt print features clouds and ocean waves reminiscent of traditional artwork. Underneath, layers of black and pink petticoats provide structure as well as contrast.

Susato pairs this dress with delightful accessories: black platform Mary-Janes, floral tights, a warm pink hair bow, and the finishing touch: a stuffed rabbit with heart patterns, lop ears, and a top knot to echo her own hairstyle.



Haori

Pastel yellow and deep blue comprise the base hues of this look, making for a lovely complement to Susato's. Instead of the high collars found in classic lolita, Haori's dress features a kimono collar; the long sleeves also feature a subtle kimono-inspired print. Red accents provide striking contrast and vibrance to Haori's coordinate. Her sleeve trim, neckline, and obi are all red, as well as the straps on her geta and the details on her hairpieces.

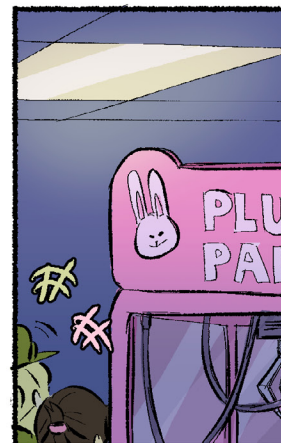
The trim not only accentuates her yellow-and-blue theme, but also

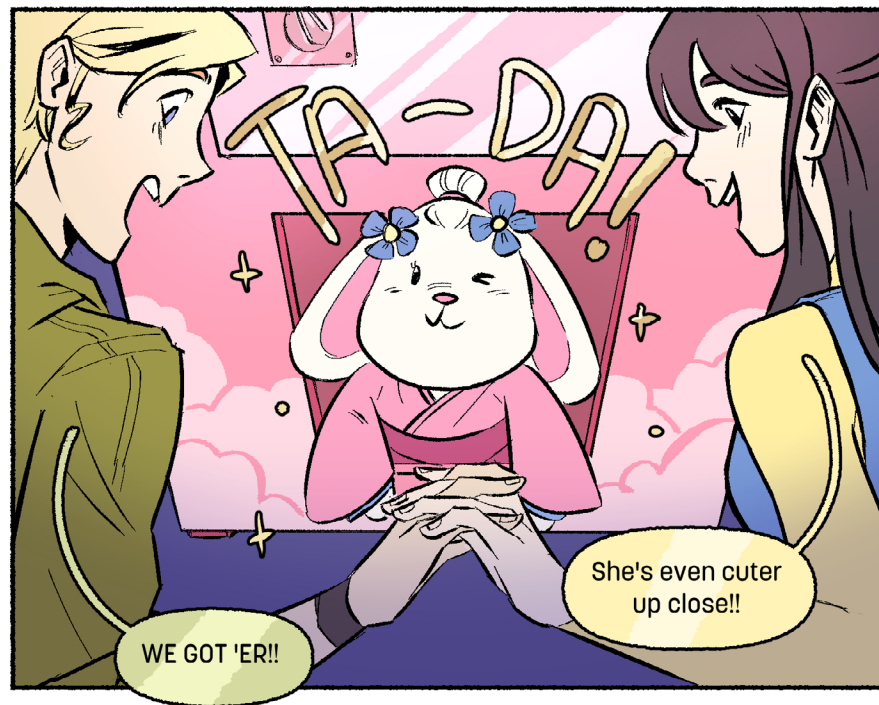
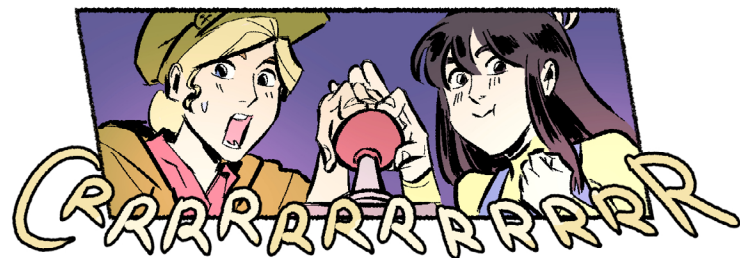
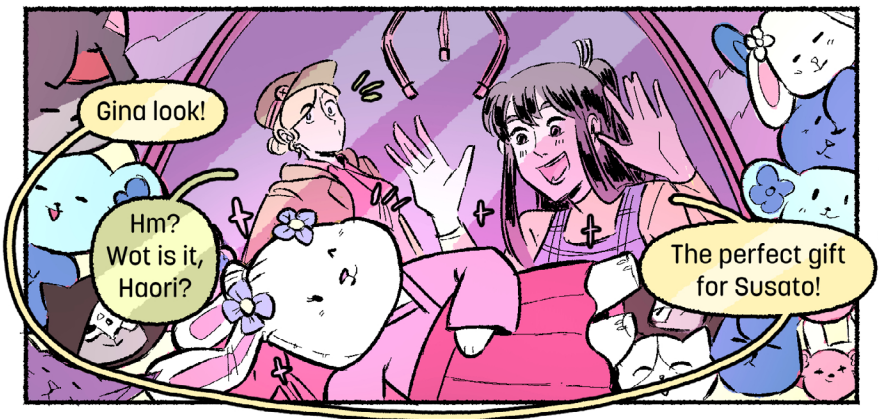
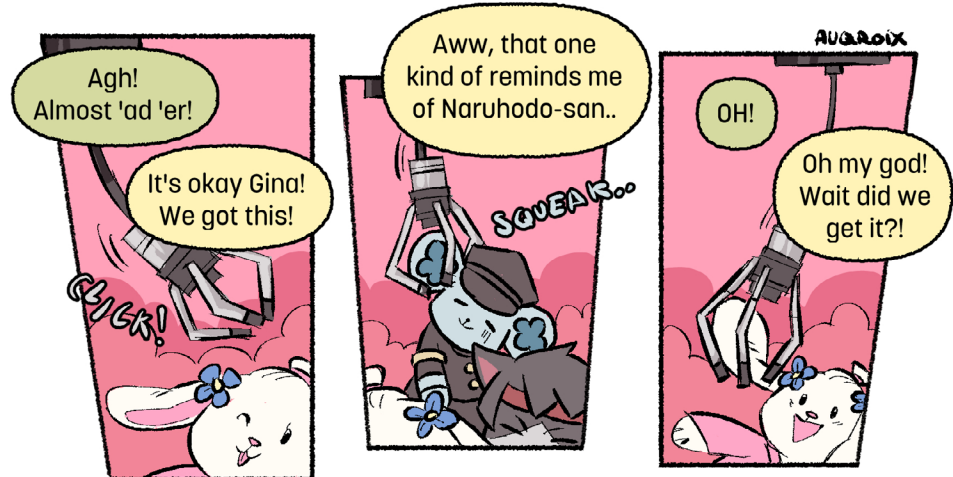
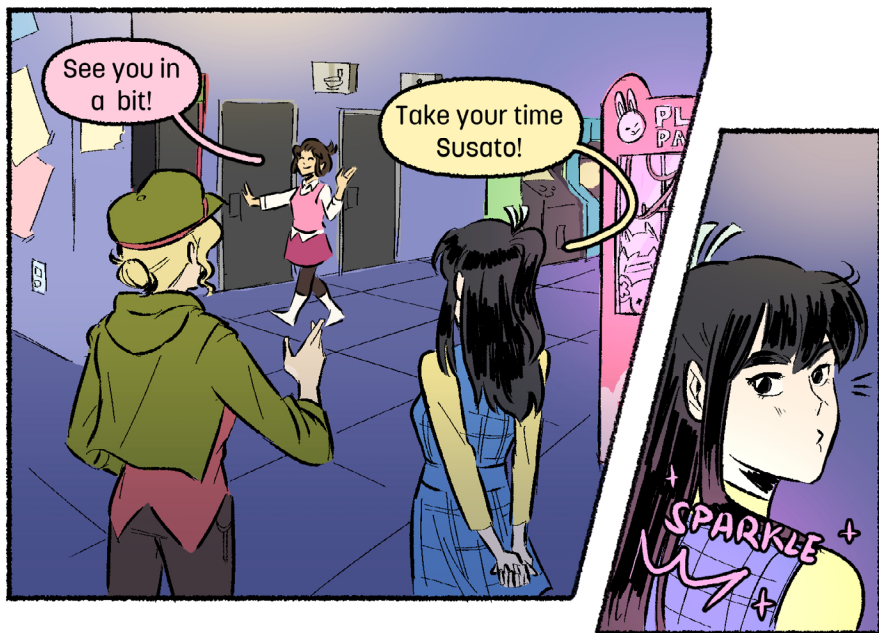
draws the eye toward the highlight of the dress: its print, which depicts ocean waves splashing before a rainbow in a cloud-dotted sky. A pink petticoat rounds out the skirt's silhouette and ties the look together.

With her flowing kimono sleeves, flower-dusted tights and star hairpieces, Haori looks nothing short of ethereal. Her use of jewel tones alongside pastels makes this coordinate an ideal choice for both spring and fall.



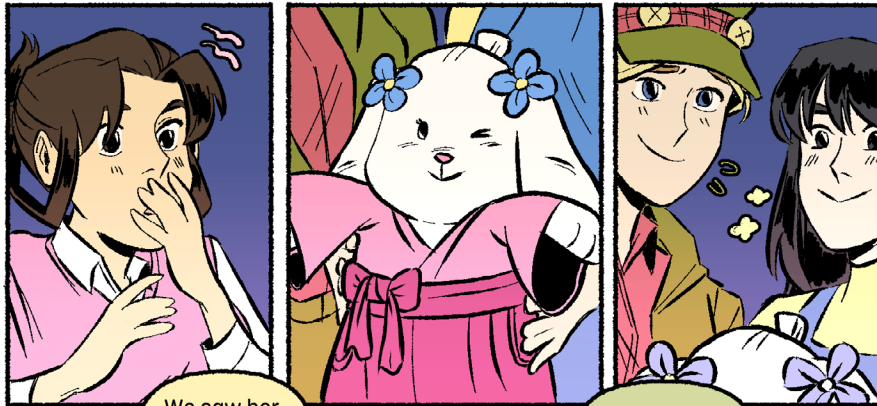
Haori Murasame and Susato Mikotoba demonstrate the range of wa-lolita possibilities: where kimono sleeves and Japanese textile patterns remain a common thread between the two, their coordinates feature contrasting elements—pink and teal, celestial and floral—that masterfully complement each other.







AUGROIX



We saw her
and had to get
her for you!

I love her so
much, you didn't
have to!

Nah, she was
worf it for ya.

Oh..
She's so cute!
Is she for me?

Thank you..
I cherish the
both of you
greatly



In the Mirror

by Momo

There's someone in the mirror
Pink and bright
A hand covering her mouth
Eyes closed
Lashes fluttering

There's someone in the mirror
Black and dim
Hands behind his back
Chest puffed out
Back straight

There's someone in the mirror—



It's Susato.

She smiles, eyes crinkling
Closes them, takes a deep breath—
And he exhales, slow and steady.
Opening them up again.

Susato is in the mirror.

Spot Art by Math

MATH'23



The Summer's Lotus

by Eli

THE SUMMER'S LOTUS

July 15th, 1901, 1:23PM: Tokyo, Japan,
Ueno Park, Shinobazu Pond

With Summer essentially in full swing in Japan, Mikotoba Susato was glad to have days every now and again where she was able to enjoy it. While she of course loved her legal work at her and Naruhodō Ryūnosuke's new law office, she couldn't deny her desire to sometimes take a break from it all and just let the sun shine on her face. And thankfully, the perfect opportunity had come thanks to Naruhodō taking a brief trip to Yokohama for a meeting, and she wasn't going to waste a moment of it.

With this free time, Susato and her girlfriend, Murasame Haori, has decided to go out and spend some time together at one of their favorite parks. And it seemed that they weren't alone in such thoughts, as there were a great many individuals, couples, and groups of people present and walking around the location. Some people had even brought their pets with them, much to Susato and Haori's mutual delight.

After sharing a picnic together in one of the grassy sitting areas of the park, Susato and Haori had gone over to Shinobazu Pond to see if the lotus flowers had come along with the season. To their luck, the pond was essentially in full bloom and beautiful, creating a wonderful



backdrop to gaze upon. It was so enchanting that Susato couldn't stop staring, as it almost felt like she was in a fairytale for a few moments.

"Come on, Susato-chan!"

Haori suddenly exclaimed, breaking Susato's quiet thoughts as she tapped her on the shoulder, "Let's go while we have time!"

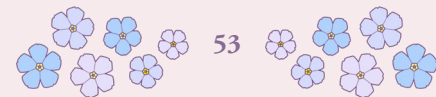
"Go? Go where?" Susato questioned, as she was out of whatever loop that her girlfriend was currently in.

Haori rolled her eyes at her girlfriend's surprised face, but then she giggled as she started to pull her along. "We're going to go wading in the lotus pond," she said excitedly, "I paid for the fee because I thought it sounded like fun!"

"Oh? That sort of activity exists?" Susato asked curiously, making sure to move on her own two feet so that she wasn't being dragged anymore, "I did not know that was something you could do here."

"According to the lady at the desk that I made the arrangements with, it's relatively new," Haori explained, "So I thought it was a perfect time to give it a shot!"

Susato nodded in understanding, but she then quieted herself as she and Haori made their way over to a small group of other people, and what seemed to be a tour guide then came over to give them instructions for wading in the ponds. Susato definitely wasn't used to taking her shoes off in public, but she understood that it was all part of the process and kept herself quiet, so she could see Haori giggling at her slight discomfort.



Minutes later, everyone was led out to the pond to get started, and though it felt strange for their clothes to just get wet, both Susato and Haori were glad that the water wasn't too cold. Since they weren't required to stay together with the group, the two girls walked off together to their own area of the pond in order to find a nice collection of lotus blooms.

"You know, Susato-chan. These lotus blooms remind me a lot of you," Haori commented as she gently brushed her fingertips along some of the petals of the water blossoms, "Loving summer, prominently pink, and beautiful to look at."

Susato felt her cheeks burn, and she just knew they were red. "Goodness me, Haori-sama..." she said as she put a hand up to her mouth, "You know exactly what to say to fluster me."

Haori simply shrugged in response, a teasing smile on her face. "You're perfectly capable of doing the same when you aren't acting so seriously all the time," she said as she massaged Susato's shoulders, "Your law work has gotten you all stiff."

Susato's cheeks puffed out slightly for a moment, but Haori then made a face which caused both of them to laugh for a moment. "The flowers truly are beautiful," Susato then commented with a smile, "They remind me of your cheeks sometimes."

Sure enough, Haori's cheeks went pink after such a comment, but she then looked delighted at the comment. A moment later though, she walked over to a collection of lotus seed pods and plucked one off. Susato's mouth dropped open, but Haori held a hand up to reassure her. "Relax. It's part of the activity," she said, "One pod of seeds per group."

"I suppose I should have guessed," Susato answered as she recomposed herself, "I do like lotus seeds. But we probably shouldn't eat them here where we might leave the remains of our waste behind."

It took Susato only seconds to realize that Haori was looking at her in unamused fashion. She then gestured to everyone else around

them, showing how other people were digging into their seed pods and discarding the extra pieces in the water around them, including the guide. It seemed she had been the only one to think about what she had suggested, to both her surprise and amusement.

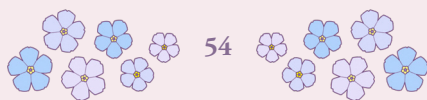
"This is what I mean when I talk about you being so stiff and proper all the time," Haori said with a grin as she one sees out of the seed head and started to peel it for herself, "You worry too much about the things that don't need to be worried about."

She handed her girlfriend the seed pod for herself, and Susato promptly popped one out for herself so she could start peeling it. "Well," she said with a bit of a huff, "It never hurts to at least be sure."

Haori giggled again, and Susato couldn't help but feel entranced by her lovely smile. "No, I suppose it doesn't," she said as she started to look around at their surroundings.

Once she was confident that no one was paying any attention to them, Haori leaned in and snuck a quick kiss to Susato's cheek. Not one to be completely outdone though, Susato snuck a peak to her girlfriend's lips once she knew they had a second, which made her blush once again. However, the two girls then shared another smile and laugh with each other, amused by their own silliness.

The two girls then took hands, knowing that no one would think anything suspicious of that, and simply looked out over the pond once more. They sometimes needed reminders that there was more to their lives than just the work that they were each devoted to, but they couldn't think of any better way to do so than at each other's sides. Even as the sun provided the warmth and light of summer, both Susato and Haori felt that nothing was more beautiful than the one standing next to them, and they would never want things to be any other way.







Caged Birds

by Andromeda

With all the shadows cast by all the big, important people fighting over anything that glittered, it was only natural that some folks would be left to a life in the dark. Like it or not, it was just how things *were*, and though she'd lived a life in constant refusal to just sit back and surrender, part of Gina had always known this to be an inevitability.

Darkness was how it began, and in darkness it would end. From the second she'd stowed away beneath the seat of that omnibus, she'd already been imprisoned—it had just taken her a little while to actually wind up in this cell. First bound by the shackles of McGilded's order to keep silent, then later by the weight of her own lies...

Right. This was just how things ended up—just what folks like her deserved. If not deserved, at least it was what they *got*, and no amount of fighting that was going to change it. Gina had learned the hard way through a life of bruises and beatdowns that holding onto hope where there wasn't any—the kind that came with the kind of naive optimism folks could only really have if they came from a much better life than hers—only ended up hurting more later.

Whatever that well-meaning and starry-eyed lawyer, Mr. 'Oddo, had been rambling on about, it wasn't real. This wasn't the kind of fight that Gina could win—and, really, she *shouldn't*, should she?

She was guilty. Like it or not. Maybe not of shooting Windibank, but of plenty of other things, and it was only because of all of *that* things had ended up here in the first place. Really, it was only right...

at least, that's what they'd say. If she didn't go down for this, it would be for something else eventually. Better just to give up before anyone else got hurt trying to fight the battle for her.

After hours of pacing across the same few feet of her cell, she finally sat down cross-legged on her cot, head dropped against the rough stone wall behind her. The action pushed her hat down low over her eyes, which was appreciated even without their being much light to block out. The world itself was something she wanted no part in at the moment.

But Gina's world wasn't to stay confined to that small, lonely place. Not for now.

Quiet steps, polite and hesitant, echoed down the hallway before finally approaching her cell. A few times, they stopped entirely, but eventually resumed until at last they reached the other side of the cell bars.

Though she was aware by that point of another person's presence, Gina didn't stir. Whoever it was that had come to bug her could sod off—she wasn't about to be talked down to, or laughed at, or even *looked* at, and there was no one she wanted to see.

Though burning brightly in that moment, her conviction was to be disproven the very next moment in response to a quiet voice.

"...I hope I'm not disturbing you. I must ask that you forgive me, if so."

Forgive me, she'd asked, then swallowed, half not expecting an answer from the girl sitting so silent and still within her cell. *Forgive me*, she'd asked, and it was forgiveness Susato sought—not for this, perhaps, and not from Gina, but from the world itself.

There was none to be found. Not in this prison, not in this country, and while she knew she'd never be able to outrun the guilt thrumming like a frightened bird within her chest, there was no other option. Hands

clasped before her and nervously fidgeting beneath hanging kimono sleeves, she knew she could not linger for long before fleeing back home from her own crime. In truth, it had made little sense to visit at all...

Yet, something had compelled her, just the same. Perhaps misery loved company, and the sharp dagger of guilt was clever enough to recognize its own kind.

To pretend that was the only feeling that beat within her chest in regards to Gina would have a lie, however. But that was something Susato was not yet ready to face, even as it carried her here like a sakura petal on the wind to stand in this very place.

"...If yer sorry..." Gina's voice finally came after several heartbeats of silence, "Then why're ya doin' it? Turn back 'round and march off all nice and sweet-like if it bothers you that much."

Falling silent for a moment, Susato almost questioned why she'd bothered coming here—almost. The words were sharp, turned towards her like spikes on a fencepost preventing intruders, but their edge was dulled by the darkness and the underlying solemnity in Gina's voice.

"...I would say that if you wanted me to do so, I'd turn around and do just that..." she said quietly, even while stepping closer. "...But that would be a lie. My father has fallen ill, and I must return to Japan to see him. I came to say goodbye."

"Yer leavin'?"

The words had come out before Gina could stop herself, surprised and more emotional than she'd have liked. Swallowing, she shrugged and looked away, her eyes having snapped towards Susato in surprise as she had spoken. "...Wotever. Ya didn't 'ave ta. Dunno wot yer 'opin to get outta it—already told yer friend I don't need defendin', so I hope yer not lookin' to change me mind."



Lips pursed together, Susato stilled on the other side of the cell bars. Had Gina not known better, perhaps she'd have mistaken her for a statue. "I didn't come to try to change your mind," she finally said, then repeated, "only to say goodbye. Seeing as how we don't know if...we'll have the chance to see one another again."

It was a statement that hung heavy and thick in the air, and for a few heartbeats neither girl spoke. Whatever the future held was not only uncertain, but most likely dark—best case scenario, it seemed, they never saw one another again, separate lives led across an ocean...

Worst case...

Gina suppressed a shudder, the fire of what anger she could muster flaring briefly brighter in an attempt to escape the chill. "Right, well, ya said it. Off with ya, now, then—dunno why ya think I'd care about all that."

Even as she spoke, her voice broke, and she endeavored to hide it under a laugh as she continued. "Dunno why you care, either. 'S'not like it matters. All that's for friends 'n stuff, 'n I'm not the kind of person who has those—"

"Stop it."

Not only were the words themselves a surprise to them both, but so was the fervor and sternness behind them. Fingertips pressed to her lips, Susato nearly apologized for snapping, but found herself instead continuing to speak, giving voice to a strange kind of frustration that could only be formed on the other side of something far more sentimental.

"It's not fair of you to talk that way. I don't have a lot of time left here—neither do you—and I won't waste it listening to that," she shook her head, emotion sticking in her throat. "You're sitting there brooding to yourself and talking as if no one in the world cares about you—do you think you're the only one affected by that?"

Don't you realize what it means when you say something like that about other people?"

Words coming faster, she paused for breath, blinking away a sheen of wetness in her eyes. "...If you insist on saying that you're the sort of person no one cares about..." she murmured, voice shaking, "then you're saying that I can't care about you. But that isn't true, and it isn't fair—so, forgive me, I beg of you, but I must ask that you take it back."

Wide-eyed and lips parted, Gina stared at her. It wasn't the first time in her life she had both looked and felt like some kind of kicked dog, but this was different—very different. No, it wasn't as if Susato had kicked her; it was as if she'd...what?

Lowered herself to the ground and offered her scraps, or a petting hand, when Gina had least expected it, and even while scolding her? So surprised she couldn't even think to bare her teeth, Gina looked away, hands holding tightly to her clothing as she wrapped her arms around her waist.

Finally, slowly, she stood, inching closer to where Susato stood on the other side of the cell bars. Looking down, she hid her eyes behind the brim of her hat, uncertain what to say. Finally, and feeling like an awkward child, she muttered, "...Sorry. Look, ya can—you can feel 'owever ya want to, and I can't stop ya. Ya can say wotever, just the same. Doesn't mean I 'ave to believe it. Doesn't mean I 'ave to feel anythin' at all."

She was met with silence. Then, the sound of Susato's boots scraping lightly against the floor as she began to turn away. "...If that's what you want," she murmured, hands folded neatly together. If her mind and heart couldn't be kept in place, then at least she could maintain proper form in her posture. "Then I can't stop you. I'll leave you alone, now...Goodbye, Gina. And I am sorry..."



Before she could leave, Gina found her mouth opening, her entire being somehow protesting the very notion despite all of her assertions to the contrary. Having found it difficult for the past few minutes to so much as breathe, no words initially came when she tried to speak, and it was with a steadily mounting, illogical panic that she watched Susato begin to walk away.

“W-wait—! ‘Old on—” Finally, she managed to cry out, and all at once her body unfroze. Stumbling, she raced to close the distance between herself and the cell bars, ultimately falling to her knees as she reached desperately between them and made a grab for Susato’s skirt.

Even before the fabric pulled against her, Susato had stopped, looking with surprise and parted lips over her shoulder. Gaze fixed upon the ground, Gina didn’t see, her hand shaking a bit as it withdrew.

“...‘S’not...wot I want...”

Why was she saying this? It would be better if she shut up. But Susato, steps away from disappearing from her life completely, wasn’t going to be around for long enough to judge her. What else had Gina left to lose, about to be left alone in her prison?

“...But wot I want doesn’t matter. Don’t ya get that?” shaking her head furiously, she clung to the bars of her cell as she knelt upon her knees. Hanging, dirty strands of hair brushed against her cheeks as she shook her head. “I don’t *want* to be in ‘ere in the first place—I didn’t *want* to get all—all tangled up in this mess. I don’t *want* to...”

Her voice broke as the acknowledgment of feelings she’d been fighting for far too repress finally overwhelmed her with a rush of ice cold fear, and it was with embarrassment that she realized her breath had begun to hitch into sniffles. Squeezing her eyes shut against the stinging behind them, she clenched her jaw, determined not to allow anything else to slip...

It was a resolution that would be broken, the first step towards which was the sensation of Susato’s incredibly soft hand against one of her own over the cell bars. Kneeling on the ground—a level Gina was convinced someone like Susato should never sink to—she’d done her best to offer comfort, and in doing so had ensured that Gina would break completely.

“S-Sooz—”

“I know—I know...” Susato said quietly, and when Gina managed to pry open her watery eyes the ones before her were full of distraught sympathy. Pretty lips pressed into a thin line, Susato forced a breath of her own and then—impossibly—she smiled, simultaneously leaning forward to press her forehead against the bars of Gina’s cell.

“...It’s alright. I don’t know how, yet, and I don’t know in what way...but it will be. You’ll see,” Susato promised in a voice that was barely above a whisper. “...You shine too brightly to be kept in the dark.”

I’m not the one that shines—Gina had wanted to protest, but the words caught in her throat. Face pressed close to Susato’s, she fought for breath, for words, for anything...

She wanted to lean forward, to take the other girl’s head between her hands and find out just how soft the skin there truly was. She wanted to hold tightly to her hand upon the bars.

She wanted to beg her not to leave. To stay, just for a moment longer—and another after that, until one way or the other everything came to an end.

She did none of these, instead just barely managing to hold back her tears as Susato gave her hand a squeeze and began to stand.



“...Just hang in there. Alright? Everything will be alright. I’m certain of it,” she promised before departing and, though she had no evidence to back it up, and though Gina had never been prone to optimism...

She almost began to believe her.



Yamato Nadeshiko

by Elsa

Susato Mikotoba was a proper young lady who knew her supposed place in society. She knew she was expected to always be polite and graceful and keep her head down as she accepted the role of a dutiful housewife who would care for her husband and children.

The problem was she had no interest in such things and had always struggled with these expectations even as she forced down her troubling emotions.

She knew she was supposed to be gentle and pliant, but studied martial arts with zeal.

She knew she was supposed to stay back in the household and not even think about stepping into a courtroom, but she worked to be a judicial assistant with just as much determination as Kazuma had for his own career.

She knew she was supposed to marry a man and bear children one day, but her heart raged at the thought as she considered those she really wanted.

Her rebelliousness had started early. She could try to blame it on Kazuma, but the truth was that she had always balked at the strange rules her grandmother gave her; he had only exacerbated her desire to war with expectations. Young girls were not supposed to play in the garden and get dirty and sweaty, but Kazuma always trained with

his sword whenever he wanted. Young girls were supposed to learn etiquette and manners, but Kazuma was allowed to study the law however he wished. Watching her brother live his life how he wanted did not fill her with envy or bitterness yet, but rather a determination to do the same.

Then she met Haori Murasame, another girl that did not quite fit what she was meant to be. Susato had scraped her leg while practicing her jiu-jitsu during a break at school and had intended to take care of it later rather than inform her teachers and get scolded for “rough-housing”, but Haori had seen her injure herself and rushed in to help. She had only done the basics of washing the shallow wound with water and cloth, but she had chattered away the entire time about how she wished she could study medicine one day and properly heal others.

Susato had felt a fire light up in her chest that day. Here was a kindred spirit hoping for a role that society would never give her. They had instantly become friends after that, taking solace in each other as the only people who understood each other’s out-of-reach dreams. She certainly *felt* like Haori’s only solace once her friend had finally been granted permission to study at Yuumei. Susato wanted to barge in and toss the whole student body when she heard how she was being treated by some of her classmates.

Perhaps that should have been the first clue that her feelings for Haori had started to change. It’s not that she wasn’t always fiercely protective, but as she started to see Haori’s giddy smile and shining eyes less and less, her heart yearned to see them again far more than it should have.

It wasn’t until a few days after Haori’s trial for the murder of Jezaille Brett, when the relief of her exoneration finally settled in, that Susato finally collapsed into a sobbing mess alone in her room as she



realized that she was in love with her best friend, and she had almost lost her to the biased system that tried to exclude her solely because of her gender.

But apparently, Susato couldn't be content with breaking the rules with just Haori. No, her heart had to long for another as well.

Meeting Gina Lestrade was only doomed to further distance Susato from meeting societal expectations. One would be liable to call her a bad influence, and perhaps it was true. Gina was like an open flame, constantly at risk of being snuffed out by outside forces but strong enough to fight back against the cold and dangerous enough to spark an all-consuming blaze, like the one that lay inside Susato.

Susato had thought herself worldly and well-informed, but hearing from Gina's lips the hardships she had faced her whole life had told her how grossly she had underestimated how truly terrible the world could be to those born with a bad lot in life. That night before Windibank's, Gina had simply let Susato brush her hair as she related horrible stories of living on the street with no guarantee of food or shelter and fighting for every scrap of a good thing she could find as if she was merely discussing the weather; Mason Milverton had not been the first dead body she had seen, and she had treated that fact like a passing trifle.

Susato had been nothing short of appalled, but the stories had served to increase her admiration for Gina even more. Despite the hardships and prejudices thrown at her, Gina still kept a kind heart; yes, she claimed not to trust any adult, but the way she had opened up to Susato and her desire to defend Iris's manuscript made it clear that she was soft-hearted after all.

She hated having to leave when her father called her back to his ailing side. She hated not being there for Gina during her trial. She hated not being there for her when she got out of jail. She hated the way that missing Gina felt like missing Haori.

When the time came, Susato jumped at the chance to go back to Great Britain as soon as she could to see Gina and all the others at 221B even as she hated having to leave Haori behind yet again. That ache had lessened when she finally arrived on English soil to see Gina Lestrade in the guise of an (unofficial) inspector. Seeing her friend so happy and proud in a role that she must have struggled to achieve and maintain had sent her reeling, to be honest. Gina did nothing but surprise and delight her in all the best ways.

And then Inspector Gregson turned up dead, and Susato wished once again that she did not have to restrain herself, that she could rage however she wanted. She would never forget the agony on Gina's tearful face when she delivered the news, and she wished she could inflict that pain tenfold onto Jigoku for what he had done.

After everything, parting ways had never hurt so much, and, of course, Susato had failed to recognize the true weight of her feelings until it was far too late. It wasn't until the eve of her departure that she realized she had fallen in love with someone she should not have for the second time, but Gina was still grieving and Susato was leaving for an indefinite amount of time; there was nothing she could do.

So she had to say goodbye and pretend she didn't want to kiss her friend so very badly.

And then Susato was left unable to admit her love for either Haori or Gina. How could she when her heart ached for both of them in equal measure? How could she when both had so much to worry about in their respective positions? How could she when she would always be separated from one of them?

And now... Well, now she—

"Oi, Sooze, wotcha 'angin' back for?"

"Is everything alright, Su? You're falling behind."



Susato blinked. Gina and Haori were both looking back at her, concern etched on their faces.

Somehow she had gotten so lost in her thoughts that she had completely forgotten where she was, walking through one of London's



parks, observing the blooms of roses, daffodils, peonies, and many others; a perfect opportunity on a rare sunny day for a date.

A beautiful backdrop befitting for her beautiful companions.

"My apologies, I was merely thinking... of how happy I am to be here with you," Susato responded, smiling at

them. "I truly wouldn't want to be anywhere else."

Predictably, they both blushed and looked away.

It had been a few years since she had first decided to forge her own path as Naruhodou's judicial assistant. This latest trip to London had been the first time that she, Haori, and Gina all happened to be in the same place; she had not wasted the opportunity.

Her two friends had immediately clicked on their first meeting. Haori couldn't stop gushing about all that she had heard about Gina from Susato and how excited she was to finally meet her, especially as an official member of Scotland Yard; Gina, on the other hand, had been almost starstruck, crumbling under the other's compliments and admitting she had been looking forward to meeting her too.

Susato had been foolish to worry about having to choose one of them. It had been ridiculously easy to convince the two to give this strange relationship a try.

"Let's keep going and enjoy the day, shall we?" Susato stepped up and brazenly grabbed each of their hands in hers and tugged them forward with her.

The road was rough and would continue to be rough, but she would not shy away from those complexities anymore. She would keep Haori's glove-chapped hands and Gina's quick-moving fingers in her own for as long as she could.

Susato Mikotoba would not fall to expectations and rules, and she would damn the consequences before even considering a life without those she loved.



Like Flowing Water

by Pringle

Susato checks her phone—almost 1pm. She should be able to make it to the hotel in time to check in, she just needs to hurry...!

Swiping the screen to switch back to her call with Haori, the latter in question sighs.

“Su—hey! I can hear you fumbling around through the speaker, y’know! Did you land in town yet?”

Haori Murasame, her dearest friend. She’s stood beside Susato and her dancing endeavors for as long as she could remember, all while studying medicine on top of that. Her friend is a truly talented individual, she never ceases to amaze.

She bemoans the lack of space for a plus one. Haori would have loved to see these sights, Japanifornia *is* quite a diverse place.

“Yes,” Susato finally answers, “just a little jetlagged, that’s all. Shouldn’t you be asleep by now?” She teases, her voice laced in a taunting tone.

“Urghh, I just wanted to make sure you landed well! Not to mention I slept in awfully late...I’ll go to bed eventually, Susato! I’ve just got a few more books I’d like to skim first...”

She loves her best friend, she truly does, but she’s so incredibly *stubborn*. It’s nearly 4:30 am back in Japan, yet she still persists...she supposes that’s why she and Haori click so well, Susato thinks. She can

already see Haori in her mind, glasses tilting off her nose, squinting at her computer with some video game music playing in the background.

She’ll be home soon enough.

“That’s very considerate of you, Haori, but please go to sleep! I’ve already checked in, I just need to check out the studio, alright? And I’ll send pictures! Take care!”

Muttering a soft *sorry* to Haori, she hastily hangs up, praying Haori doesn’t freak out on her end. She’ll call back later, she texts, and breathes a sigh of relief when the message goes through.

The hustle and bustle of the train station drowns her ears, businessmen and students bumbling around, the whistle of trees blowing in the wind, everything around Susato is music to her ears.

Now boarding. Next destination is the—

That’s her cue! Susato grabs her suitcase, readjusts her backpack, and steps onto the train.

She settles in nicely, managing to nab a seat to sit down on. The train begins to move, and Susato finds herself becoming restless.

She’s here for something *big*. A dance competition, with contestants coming from across the globe. How she was selected for such a thing is beyond her.

Plugging in her headphones and turning on some music, she opens the first social media app that catches her eye.

The first video she sees makes her traitorous heart skip a beat. A renowned dancer, twirling gracefully on a live stage.

Nikolina Pavlova.

The video pictures a girl just around Susato’s own age, picturing her gracefully flitting about, spotlight shining, reflecting back through the sequins spread throughout her outfit, little circles each containing their own rainbow of color.





Pavlova herself was *beautiful*. No doubt worthy of her “Angel of the stage” moniker. Her performance was amazing, her platinum blonde hair that shined like the sun under the stage lights, her lithe yet toned build, all wrapped up in a sleeveless baby blue dress, flowing like water across the stage.

Her dance ends, the velvet curtains drawn to a close, and Susato feels as if she’d been snapped out of a trance. She can’t help but be so captivated with the girl. Even through a shaky clip with subpar quality, she’s a marvel to behold, yet so *human* in a way that’s awfully endearing.

She had defected from a dance troupe and managed to get the heads of production canned for abuse and misconduct, saving herself and the rest of her troupe while she was at it. It was truly admirable, the strength and determination to break free of such strong chains...

Nikolina Pavlova is a wonderful person, Susato concludes. A truly stunning person.

Nikolina Pavlova will also be at the same competition as Susato.

Would she get to meet such an amazing person? Would she manage to befriend her, or would she mess it up? Perhaps she could even—

The train lurches to a stop, sending Susato’s spiraling to a crashing halt. Her cheeks are flushed, no doubt. Her heart pounds in her ears, rhythmic and steady, albeit faster than normal—was that due to anxiety or because of Pavlova?

Arrived. Please watch your step as you leave. Next stop—

Well, what better time to go get some answers? If she happens to stumble across the girl that’s sent her head spinning in the stars?

Then she’ll chalk it up to luck.

Darka nuzzles against Nikolina’s leg as she tries to tie up her pointe shoes, her beloved cat batting at the ribbons with her stubby little paws.

“Darka, you cannot do that, I need those ribbons,” Nikolina chides, patting her cat on her fuzzy head before kneeling down to continue tying her shoes up.

Darka meows, walking in circles around Nikolina’s feet. She’s purring as Nikolina picks the black cat up, hefting her onto her shoulder as she pets Darka.

“Ah, you’re lucky you’re so adorable, Darka. I can’t help but give you some attention, what with how much you beg for such attention all the time,” Nikolina croons, dropping the ribbons and gently picking up Darka, twirling her cat around once before softly setting her down.

Darka meows one last time, and pads off to a corner of the room.

She quickly ties her shoes and sets towards her music player, picking something to dance to. She’s already done her warm up stretches, but she doesn’t need to worry about anything for her competition dance just yet, she has a month’s time to plan.

The music starts, and Nikolina descends into an ocean, the comforting notes surrounding her like flowing water, her muscle memory kicking in as she swirls around the empty practice room aimlessly, just losing herself in the familiar embrace of dance.

The music swells, and so does Nikolina’s heart. She spins, she jumps, she *soars*, the music bringing her to new heights, a crescendo she never tires of.

Her dance ends, chest heaving. She wipes the sweat from her brow, smooths the wrinkles down from her clothes—

And someone begins to clap.

“Wha—”



Startled, she spins around, only to meet a frazzled girl's face. Chocolate brown eyes steeled with resolve, paired with fluffy dark brown hair messily tossed into a bun. Her face seems slightly flushed, as if she were in a rush. A beauty mark lies beneath her right eye. She wears a black turtleneck, along with a red-pink skirt and some boots. Quite captivating, if Nikolina had to say.

"Ah! H-hello! I'm sorry about that," the girl bows, "your dancing is simply magnificent though. I couldn't help but stop and watch, Pavlova-san."

"...Thank you, but I do not know you. Who are you, if I may ask?"

"Where are my manners! My name is Susato Mikotoba, I am a fellow dancer invited to this studio for an upcoming event in about a month's time. It's a pleasure to meet you, Pavlova-sa—Miss Pavlova," the girl extends her hand in greeting, awaiting a response.

The girl is...strange. She seemed to have been watching Nikolina's dance, slipping near the door without her knowledge. She should be angry of course, but the fight leaves her as soon as it comes to mind.

She seems polite enough, quite cute—friendly. Familiar. She'll have to do a quick search online later.

Lost in her mind for too long, Nikolina takes the girl's hand, shaking it in return.

"I've heard much about you! You're a wonderful dancer, Miss Pavlova. And a great person. It's simply a pleasure to meet you!" Miss Mikotoba regards her with such fervor, not complimenting her for her looks or high ranked performances, but as a great *person*.

Dancing is all she is referred to for, so this was a great shock to her system. What makes her stand out as a good person, as Nikolina Pavlova the person, rather than Nikolina, the Angel of the Stage?

Nikolina flushes at the compliment, unused to such general praise.

Darka chirps at the newcomer, tentatively walking towards the girl—no, towards Miss Mikotoba, her bright eyes boring into the other girl's soul.

"That's my Darka, I was given permission to bring her—I simply couldn't bear to be without her for so long, you see," Nikolina murmurs. "She is adorable, no?"

Miss Mikotoba kneels to the ground to pet Darka, her cat in turn flopping over onto her back, purring like a motorcycle engine.

"Oh my! Darka tends to take a while to warm up to new people..." Miss Mikotoba is playing with Darka, the girl mumbling little compliments to her cat.

"I wonder what it is that she likes about you...? Well, if anything, please feel free to stay here for a while, if you'd like. Are you lost?"

"No," Miss Mikotoba replies, "I just wanted to get a feel for the layout of the building." She pauses her affectionate pats for a moment, turning her gaze towards Nikolina. It's so...warm, for a change. Not the usual cold, calculated glares of judges, the frenzied looks of fans.

Just...welcoming. Like a hug from a friend.

Friend...

"I didn't mean to stumble in upon you, and I apologize for that," Miss Mikotoba states, "I shouldn't overstay my welcome, despite the fact I wasn't welcome in the first place."

She turns to leave with a quick whispered apology, but before she can leave Nikolina finds herself rushing forward, grabbing the girl's hand in her own.

"You may call me Nina, if you'd like," she says. "I did not mean to make you think you were not welcome. Quite the opposite, actually. There is...something about you, if I may say. You captivate me, Miss Mikotoba. I'd like to know more about you, if that's alright."



Miss Mikotoba flounders, her face falling in her hands as she leans against the wall next to the door. She seems embarrassed, the tips of her ears burning a bright rosy hue. She quickly calms herself, seemingly hyping herself up with a quick pat to her cheeks, as if she could fan away the flames spreading across her cheeks. Endearing.

“Are you sure, Miss Pavlova—Nina? I’m nothing special, really. I don’t know how I was picked for such a high ranking event either—surely you have other people you’d rather speak with at the moment?”

“No, I do not,” Nikolina lies, she has a few ideas she needs to consult a few dance instructors about, but that can wait. Right now, she must pursue the friendship of Miss Mikotoba. “Would you like to dance? It is only me and Darka, I’m afraid.”

Perhaps she’s lonelier than she initially thought.

Miss Mikotoba looks bewildered, face wild before suddenly going blank. She seems lost in her own mind for a few moments, a resolution solidifying in her swirling brown eyes.

Perhaps Nikolina has stared at Miss Mikotoba’s beautiful eyes too much.

“It’d be a pleasure, if I may have this dance, Nina?”

She remembers now. She read about Miss Mikotoba in an article, something about studying law and practicing martial arts in her spare time—the activities definitely show in the way she speaks, in her tone and wording precise and swift (albeit inconsistent due to being slightly embarrassed), in the curves and divots of her muscles, hidden with thick fabric.

“You may. Uh—can I call you...?”

“...Sure. You may call me Susato, if you want.” Susato smiles, her beauty mark shifting as her eyes crinkle with mirth.

She takes Susato’s outstretched hand into her own, and sweeps the two away.



Coloring Page Contest Winner

Thank you to all who participated!



Pearly



@pearlnareff

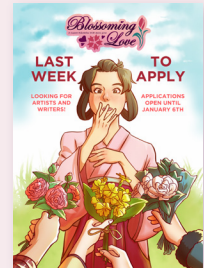
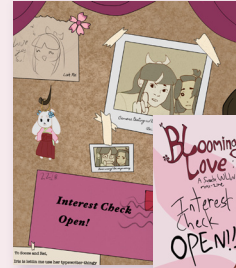
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Promo Team Showcase



Ayun

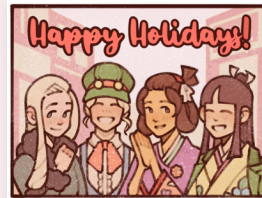
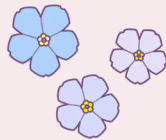
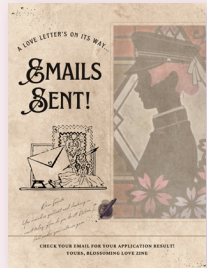


Rai

Pringle



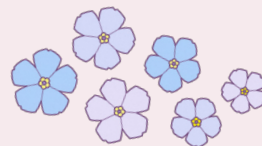
Sherlock



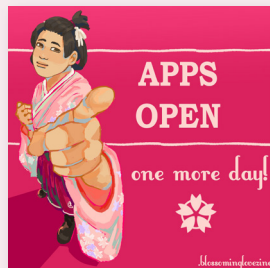
May



Momo



Sigma



Yozi

Artists & Writers



Ayun

 @ayyunsart

 @ayyunsart



Meg

 @satsuma.v

 @satsumav



Math

 @to.math

 @tomathh



*To My
Beloved*

River

 @theriveroflight

 @theriveroflight



Kiel

 @TWIN_FANTASY

 @wubkiel



wasure-nagusa


Valentine

 @myfunnyvalentinebean

 @myfunnyvalentinebean



Bams

 @vampaniki



*Dear
Love*

Digitaldreams

 @__digitaldreams

 @digitaldreams



*Remember
Me*

Defaney

 @shcherbatskayas

 @shcherbatskayas



Cas

 @CassiferLynn

 @cassiferlynnart



Spector

 @SpectorSorrows



Punkvamps

 @punkvamps



May

 @angomay

 @angomay





Feiyu

 @_feiyu



Æli

 @Ruby_Alphastar

 @elithesia-autem-danguarde



mai

 @maiisntgod

 @maiisntgod



L

 @sovrianis

 @sovrianis

 @sovrianis



Momo

 @momo_taro69



Fuffles

 @Nicandragon

 @Nicandragon




Æfa

 @ohtobeascrutnycat

 @Scrunt413



Ana

 @thesomewhatliterateaxolotl

 @ the_literary_axolotl



Rai

 @Auqroix

 @Auqroix



Masa

 @kazelnoot

 @kazelnoot



seri

 @cannedmilk_07

Promo Team



Pringle

 @pringlecan

 @pringlecan



Sherlock

 @OLDMANYAOI



Sigma

 @deadlysinsofev1

Icon: @Blueheart_me (crepe.cm)



Arill

 @arill_b_r

 @arillb



Goomy


 @goomyloid

 @goomyloid



yozi

 @yuzudonut

 @yuzudonut

 @yozzers



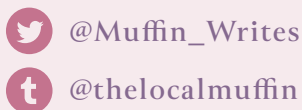
Luka

 @amphypan

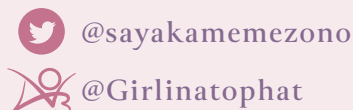
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Mod Team

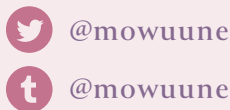
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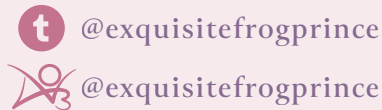
Social Media Mod



Art Mod



Writing Mod



Layout Mod

